POLITICO - RELIGIOUS UPSURGE IN BAMMANGHATTEE PARGANNAH IN 1866-67 A.D.

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The subject matter of this paper is an assessment of the rebellion of Boorda Bhoomiz and Bhagwan Doss in Pargana Bamanghatti in 1866 A.D., when they used religion and ethnic background to ostracise Raja's men and other Hindus from their area. Then nineteenth century has been one of the most creative periodsin Indian History when India underwent enlightenment and political awakening, which in their turn gave birth to a new resurgent nation. But in their own way thoroughly unconnected people in most preliterate societies also responded to the atmosphere of resurgency. The object of this paper is to highlight the main facets of the state of resurgency in the parganas of Bamanghatti and its neighbouring elaka Koosoombhnd in pargannah Ooperbhag falling in Tributary Mahals, now in the state of Orissa. The account is based on the few old correspondences between 1866-71 in the Record Room of Singhbhum now preserved in the State Central Record Office, Patna.

Genesis of the Rebellion

The rebellion in Bamanghatti Pargannah was the result of distinct universal discontent prevailing in the area against the Raja's rule so much so that it was assessed by the T.E. Ravenshaw, Officiating Superintendent of Tributary Mahals, Cuttack, and Dr. Hayes, Deputy Commissioner, Singhbhum that

it was "impossible in the then state of feeling of the people to allow the Rajah to exercise any authority in Bamanghatti until such time as a settlement of rents was made and confidence restored."[1]

After the Sumbalpore rebellion in 1861, the Raja of Bammanghatti attempted to introduce a settlement and measurement of lands which were "eminently distasteful to the indigenous population who adhered to the old custom of payment as so much per hal of 40 or about 40 Bighas of land". Had the measurements been carried out with anything like fairness the people might possibly have yielded, but the Raja's Amins falsified their measurements, and his Omlahs and tehsildars did not give receipts in full for rents paid. When objections and complaints were made, the people were put off with excuses, and no attempt was made to adjust or settle their real or forced grievances. The Raja's subordinates, moreover, committed numberless oppressions and exactions and made themselves otherwise obnoxious.

These Ammens had been accompanied by their servants and friends paiks, muqdees, choubers, pole bearers and followers who had lived on the people and committed endless oppressions.

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1. From T.E.Ravenshaw, Officiating Superintendent, Tributory Mahal, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Fort William, dated Camp Deodang Mohurbhunge in Bamanghatti, the 28th April 1866.

Moreover, having been only nominally paid by the prince, they had in many instances to secure their own profits by measuring lands at double their actual area.

Repeated additions had been made to their rents and the Abwabs and miscellaneous demands had been levied to such an extent as to leave the cultivators only a bare subsistence. No system of accounts were kept and seldom were any receipts granted for payments made.

To make confusion worse confounded no regular system of collection was followed. Tunkees[2] or assignments of revenue were given by the Rajah and his Omlah and the village headmen sometimes made payments to one person and occassionally to another. Syces, tailors, merchants, servants etc. received these Tunkees and were left to collect the amount from the unfortunate raiyats. Occasionally an elephant was quartered in village, and the demand for gratious supplies for all the Raja's Omla on the spot were constant and heavy and were extracted without moderation or mercy. There was no protection offered to the raiyats and they were harassed. Under these circumstances the people were reduced to desperation.[3]

The apparent cause of the rising was that four of the Sirdars were seized, bound on an elephant and carried off to Bareepudda for refusing to supply rassuds or provision to the Raja's local agents. Sirdars were the heads of peers or divisions into which a pergannah was divided. The freedom

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2. Ibid.

3. From R.E.Ravenshaw, Officiating Superintendent, Tributory Mehals, Cuttack, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Dated Cuttack, 31st May 1866.

loving people passed their mirthful days in commune like village or patti system and the bond of allegiance to the Raja was very slight. They were a splendid fighting race and the Rajas made full use of them as pawns in a game in their quarrels with each other. They were ready to follow the local Rajas when they led them out to battle, perhaps because of the lure of booty than anything else.

Thus, with such loose bond of allegiance, the persistent attempt of superior landlord to reduce them to obedience was bound to be galling and abnoxious. They priced their liberty more than their life and they respected their heads (Sirdars) and their rule, because they had the backing of traditions and their obedience to such system was habitual. The Sirdars administered the peers in arcadian simplicity without becoming tyrants, and they were the most respected guardians of the tribals.

There had been some jealousy between the Coles and other sections of the Sudras who acquired lands or property in their village. An idea appears to have prevailed that the Coles, Santhals and Bhoomiz should retain exclusive possession of the country.[4]

The Rising

We have seen that the Sirdars were the most respected persons in their respective peers. When the four Sirdars were seized, bound on an elephant and carried off to Bareebudda

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4. From T.E. Ravenshaw, Offg., Superintendent, Tributory Mehal, Cuttacks to the Secy. to the Government of Bengal, Fort William, Dt. Camp Deodang, Moyurbhunj, in Bamanghattee, the 28th April 1866.

it became intolerable for the people. It appears that they were much incensed at their headmen having been bound and carried off and retaliated by driving the Rajh's police and every one belonging to him out of Bahalda.[5] The Raja took no measures either to conciliate the people or to maintain his authority. Dacoities commenced at night and were succeeded by day plunderings which continued for nearly a month, during which time the Raja afforded no information whatever on the subject. The first intelligence of the disorganised state of Bamunghattee was received through the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum.

As these dacoities and plunderings continued, the entire Sudro population left the country. The plunderers organised themselves under the leadership of Boorda Bhoomiz, a man of no previous notoriety, but who appeared to have taken advantage of the opportunity to bring himself to power. Boorda Bhoomiz, Bhugwan Doss, Kartika Cole, Tolkar Santhal and Chikra Cole were the chief ringleaders and instigators of the rising. They assumed the command of the country. Meetings were held at first by all the Ooperbhag Sirdars of Peers and also those of Bamanghattee from whence a deputation was sent to Ooperabhag and Bhagwan and several of the Sirdars crossed the Ghauts and went over to Bamanghattee.[6]

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5. Ibid

6. From T.E. Ravenshaw, Offg. Superintendent, Tributory Mehals, Cuttack, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated Cuttack, 31st May 1866.

It was not precisely known as to what transpired at the Bamanghattee Conference, but it was generally stated that it was agreed to reinstate the old Sirdars or Zamindars of Pergunnahs Bammenghatee, Opperbhag, Juspore and its subordinate five peers and to coerce the Rajah into measures which might be productive of less misery and oppression. Considerable bodies of men assembled, attempts were made to negotiate with the Raja's nephew, who was at the time in Bamanghatee. He appears to have offered concessions, but he acted somewhat injudiciously in causing the arrest of two or three of Bamanghatee Sirdars who had wounded his servants. Those Sirdars were later released at Baripuda, but they retaliated by turning out the Raja's people.

The pergunnah was divided into several peers of groups of villages and each peer was presided over by a Sirdar or headman. These headmen were originally either Boorahu or Santhals who as aboriginal inhabitants of the country, claimed a sort of undefined and hereditory right in the soil, and had always objected to, if not resisted, the introduction of Hindoo Hattooahs, Gwallas, Chassas, Mahantees, etc. The Rajah had at various times and for various causes, whether on good grounds or otherwise, gradually introduced and favoured the settlement of Hinduo castes and cultivators and had made grants of lands to Brahmins and temples, which though not resisted, or perhaps openly objected to, had been very distasteful to the Deslog, Boorhaus and Santals. The local names of the classes were Hatooahs and deslog. The former including all Hindoo Gwallas, Chassas and Soodras, and the latter Boorhus Coles, Bhoomiz and the indigenous population.[7]

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7. Ibid.

For sometime before open plundering commenced Ooperbhag, dacoites were night occurances, the victims being invariably Hatooahs. It was rumoured that Hatooahs would be openly plundered and molested and the Deslog would be spared. At this Hatooahs commenced to remove large quantities of their grain in the houses of their former servants belonging to deslog castes for safe custody.[8] Complete panic prevailed and people sent deputations to Bhugwan's son and agents at Bunkatti offering to pay blackmail in consideration of their houses being spared. In some cases payment was voluntary but in others it was exacted by Bhugwan's sons and agents. In every instance where protection on payment[9] was promised, an arrow and a string with three knots were given to the person to be protected with instructions to be hung up in front of their houses. At the same time a bamboo with a bundle of straw tied at the top was to be planted in front of the door. Similar tokens were used in Bamanghatee also. They had started a government of their own; they issued written orders to the headmen of villages and directed plundering operations. A state of great consternation prevailed.

The houses of Deslog were not disturbed and in a very few cases the houses of Coles, Santhals and Bhoomiz were plundered. The distinguishing marks of a pole of bundle of rice were placed before the houses of Deslog and thus their houses were protected.

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8. Ibid.,

9. Ibid..

Boorda Bhoomij, it appears, had no particular headquarters. He carried a large broad arrow to which Poojah was offered,[10] and this was the standard round which the malcontents rallied. The offering of Poojah to the broad arrow of Boorda Bhoomiz gave this leader a charismatic personality. Through this system of worship he not only secured the allegiance of the tribal people under his banner but was also successful in commenting his adherents together by evoking a feeling that his followers were the Deslog and other were Hatooah, a sense of "we-group" and "they-group". Other instances of use of religion as a vehicle of separation have not been wanting in the annals of the tribals.

In the whole rebellion, the personality of Bhagwan Doss, considered to be the descendant of the head Boorhau family of the pergannah, is interesting. His ancestors are said to have held the Zamindary of Bamanghatee pergannah. When they were deposed, they settled in Opperbhag, where the grandfather of Bhugwan obtained the post of Suberakar or Manager of the Pergannah. This continued in the family till his father was turned out with the consent of the Superintendent of Tributory Mehal for misconduct, open resistance to the Rajah, embezzlement of revenue etc. - Bhagwan Doss, however, succeeded in obtaining from the then Raja of few villages as his maintenance and Jagheer and amassed some property. He was a shrewd intelligent man. As the Raja's oppression increased Bhagwan availed

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10. From Officiating Superintendent, Tributory Mehals, Cuttack, to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Fort William, Dt. Camp Deodang, Mohurbhung in Bamanghattee, the 28th April 1866.

himself[11] of the opportunity to intrigue and foster the prevailing discontent with a view to induce a crisis, so that he might again obtain the position he had formerly occupied as not only the head of the clan but as the zamindar of the pergunnah.

The ambition of Bhagwan Doss was inextricably mixed up with the whole proceeding of plundering and dacoities and he took advantage of the situation created due to general discontent. The result was that Boorda Bhoomiz remained a cipher, getting worship and adoration in the assemblege of his adherents while the whole movement was skillfully operated by Bhagwan Doss, his sons and his agents for the satisfaction of their selfish ends.

Kashee Sirdar of Koosoombund[12] as head of peers commenced an investigation and succeeded in arresting a number of dacoits and recovered from them considerable portion of the plunder. Those dacoits confessed to Kashee Sardar that they had orders to plunder from Bhagwan and implicated two of his sons and several of his adherents. Kashee Sardar prepared a report of the case and as was his duty, proceeded to take his prisoners to the Rajah at Barripudda. But Bhugwan's sons and adherents waylaid Kasse Sirdar, rescued his prisoners and forcibly carried off the whole of his papers. Bhagwan from Bamanghatee sent armed pykes under his son Muddun Babu to arrest Kashee Sirdar.

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11. From the Officiating Superintendent, Tributory Mehal, Cuttack, to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Dt.Cuttack, 31st May 1866.

12. Ibid.,

Kasee managed to escape, but the pykes kept guard over the premises until later in the day when a party of some 400 or 500 of the Bamanghatee plunderers headed by two notorious dacoits known as Nouru and Deeba Coles and Bhugwan's gomasta arrived, having plundered another village on the way. Kasee Sirdar's house and those of the Hatooahs in his village of Kusumbund were completely plundered. The Bamanghtee plunderers were joined by a large number of the Deslog in Ooperbhag, and the party for some days laid waste some of the most prosperous villages in the Pergunnah. During the time these plundering were going on, most of the Hatooah either fled or hid in the jungle, and in their absence all the property they had previously concealed was hunted up and carried off, the major portion finding its way to Bhugwan's house at Bunkatti.

Baboo Kishan Chunder Bhunje was sent by the Rajah with a good number of pyks. They came upon the plunderers at Mouzah Moonda Kotta. Seing his party approach there was a general panic among the plunderers, who fled in all directions. The ringleaders escaped; only a few of the rebels including women and children to the number of 70 were arrested and sent captives to Baripada on 30th March. The Rajah also reached Copperabhag but he had no courage to go to Bamanghatee.

Having heard of the trouble Dr. Hayes,[13] the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum, entered Bamanghatee on the 17th April 1866. He found that all Sudro population i.e. other than the

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13. From T.F.Ravenshaw, Offg. Supdt., Tributory Mehal, Cuttak, to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Dt. Camp Deodang, Mohurbhunge in Bamanghatee, the 28th April 1866.

Santhals, Coles, and Bhoomiz were in state of the greatest consternation, having been plundered and turned out of their homes and villages. The only course open to Dr.Hayes was to take effective steps to-alley the fear which had been created and make the Sudro population return quietly to their villages. The next thing was to attempt to procure restoration of the plundered property. This was carried out in a great measure with the assistance of the Santhals, Coles and Bhumiz themselves. At last Dr. Hayes was successful in seizing the Bhugwan Doss, Kartika Cole, Boorda Bhoomiz, Tolka Santhal and Chirka Cole and other leaders of the revolt, and they were removed to Cheybassa Jail to face trial.

Seeing their leaders removed, most of the people gave valuable information and assistance in recovering plundered property and in many instances readily disgorged their share in the spoil. Dr. Hayes dealt the situation very tactfully for which he earned the Lieutenant Governor's appreciation.[14] But Rovenshaw had a different experience in Ooperbhag Pergunnah where he laboured under considerable difficulty owing to the great influence possessed by Bhugwan and his partisans and the utter and entire absence of the smallest appearance of authority on the part of the Raja. Even the bitter hatred of his oppressive Omlah did not suffice to induce the people to give any information as they dreaded their vengeance to follow after they left the place.

The losses assessed amounted to Rs. 12,267-13-10.

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14. Political Department (Resolution) Fort William, dated 11th June 1870.

Result of the rising

In consultation with Dr. Hayes a new scheme in the territory was initiated. The Raja's authority in Bamangh ty was suspended and Dr. Hayes was vested with the same civil and criminal powers in Bamanghatty as those he exercised in Singhbhum.[15]

Under section 15 of Act V of 1861 a force of 1 sub-Inspector and 8 constables was quartered on Bamanghatteegarh, and the cost was to be recovered from the Raja of Mohurbhanj.

The Sirdar or headman of each peer was permitted to exercise police powers under the guidance of Dr.Hayes. An enquiry was instituted. All the Sirdars of peers and hereditary heads of villages were to be maintained in their position; where they had been improperly ousted in near past they were to be restored.

Settlement for all villages was to be made under written agreements with the village headmen, who were to be responsible to the Sirdars of their respective peers for rents. It was also decided to discontinue the attempt to assess lands by measurements and the old system of halbundee was reverted. A fair enquiry was to be made where necessary as to the number and extent of hals held by individual cultivators. The standard of measurement was fixed at Rs.54 per hal. All awabs and mangan were abolished. It was agreed that the Rajah should give an undertaking not to demand as cess whatever beyond the fixed and proper rents [illegible].

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15. From the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal to the Officiating Superintendent of Tributory Mehal of Cuttack, Dt. Darjeeling the 14th May 1866.

proper rents before his estate was made over to him.[16]

In Ooperbhag pergunnah also the management was entrusted to Baboo Kisen Chunder Bhuje, the Raja's nephew. Land was to be properly classified and assessed and rates of rent of first, second and third quality of rice land were fixed at one rupee, annas twelve and eight per bigha respectively.

It was also decided to conclude a lease for 10 years on the above rates with the Sirdars of Peers, who were to be responsible for the collection of rents in their respective peers and also were to perform all police duties. The Sirdars were to forward the kist of revenue direct to the Raja's treasury.

The system of tunkees or assignments of revenue was discontinued and so also the demand of Awabs.

A party of police with one head constable and six constables was posted at Bunkatti for preservation of peace.

Nature of Rising and conclusion

Thus we have seen that this upsurge was an attempt to change the prevailing system of administration perpetrated by the Raja's unjust officials. We have found the phenomenon of prejudice, tension and discrimination between groups on ethnic and racial grounds. We have also found that religion and ethnic backgrounds were used between Deslog and Hatooahs successfully in this upsurge.

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16. From Officiating Superintendent Tributary Mehals of Cuttack to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Fort William, Dt. Deodang, Mohurbhange in Bamanghatee, the 28th April 1866.

In these circumstances we find that this rebellion comes in the category of other tribal rebellions like the Great Kole Rising, Santal Hul, Kherwar Movement, etc. Religion was used in this revitalization movement in the same manner as in the Birsa Movement. The leadership is charismatic as we find Boorda Bhoomiz getting the Deslog worship the broad arrow; Deslog. In Bhugwan Doss we find a shrewd politician trying to utilize every opportunity for aggrandisement of his own. We also find that in this duality of leadership, the followers got easily disillusioned at the slightest show of strength; all the rebels melted away at the very sight of the Raja's army under his nephew. But nonetheless this rebellion abounds in many administrative lessons which we can hardly afford to ignore.

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GLOSSARY

Bighas	-	Land measurement, about 2½ bighas make an acre
Omlas	-	Servant to run zamindary establishment
Amins	-	Officer who measured land
Tehsildar	-	Officer who collected land revenue
Paiks	-	Armed constables
Nugdees	-	Paid servants
Abwabs	-	Cess
Tunkees	-	Assignment of revenue
Syces	-	Grooms
Sirdars	-	Headmen of a group of villages called peer
Peers	-	Territorial grouping of ten to twelve villages
Ghauts	-	Mountaindus passes
Pergannah	-	Bigger territorial unit comprising a large number of villages
Hatooahs	-	Hindus, Gwallas, Chassas, Soodras
Deslog	-	Indigenous population of Bhoomiz Santals and Coles
Gwallas	-	A Hindi subcaste of Herdsmen
Chassas	-	Cultivating labourers, a lower Hindu subcaste
Mahautees	-	A subcaste of Orriya Hindu
Poojah	-	Worship
Suberkar	-	Managership
Jagheer	-	A tenancy in lieu of service
Goomasta	-	Zamindar's servant to run revenue administration
Hal	-	Plough
Halbundi	-	Unit of rent
Kist	-	Instalment